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THE CARROLL QUARTERLY

SPRING 1995

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JOHN CARROLL UNIVERSITY

THE CARROLL QUARTERLY

SPRING 1995

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MICHELLE TACKLA

RESPECTING LIFE

He was the color
of orange sherbert,
that canary.

And in the morning,
his song was like a honeydew
plucked from a grafted fruit tree.

I savored his tune, hybrid fruit,
wedding the whistle of a tea kettle
with the purring of an engine.

Beholding his gossamer throat
swelling, wings vibrating,
so fully enraptured

was I that it could carry on--through
the morning hustle-bustle, through Looney
Toons, (the putty tat), whose lunch

was whose--that I wanted to capture
that miracle in my palm, crazy im-
pulse to open the cage door ...

I grabbed, it jerked,
darting across,
weaving away, from one

perch to another,
chest heaving, wild
fear of that giant human

hand grasping what was free,
like trying to hold light,
I crushed its wing.

SUSAN PRISE

CANADIAN GEESE

They say they mate for life,
and so as I sat states away
I wondered about you,
your feet in stirrups,
and his too; and wondered if you had.

His mount bucked
and tried to throw him;
green from the track.
You bucked also,
and strained and pushed
white then blue then red
from pain and exhaustion and exertion:
And I sat on a park bench
looking at geese.

SALLY JORANKO

COBALT BLUE

My mom's rare hugs smelled like that blue Argo starch
She boiled and hauled to the basement every Monday.
Mrs. Bobel, across the hall, and Mom
Whispered about Joyce Graser's mother, who
Was divorced. Mr. Graser wasn't
Joyce's daddy.

After that time I'd seen Joyce take those white things
Out of a drawer and made her tell me what
Periods were, I was never allowed
To sleep over at Joyce's again. So

Never again did I get to watch Vi Graser
Puff Coty powder on her lovely
Heart-shaped face, or to push the lid down
On the round, peach-colored box covered
With funny little white fans, forcing out
A fine, fragrant mist of woman smell.

"T'n it *cunnin'*?" she'd drawl, and hug me with her
Free arm while a glistening, bright red smile
Flowered from a golden tube across her lips.
While she combed her hair I studied the frieze
Joyce had painted all around their pink bath--
Black silhouettes of naked ladies kneeling
Behind huge black beach balls.

I longed to make that quick castanet click
Vi's heels made on the tile floor and
Dragged my heels (though my father's whistle
Outside meant *You get home right now!*)--

SALLY JORANKO

Lingering dangerously in their living
Room, where slanted venetian blinds kept it
Always cool and dim, like the blue glass top
Of her coffee table, where I searched my
Round nine-year-old face, above the white collar
Of my St. Joseph's uniform, for signs
Of a pointed chin and glistening lips
All blue and lovely and strange.

ANNA MARIE STRYZ

MISSING SPRING

It was the shortest
in the whole yard
but it stood tall and brave.
And I ascended it daily, climbing
its limbs, holding onto
its outstretched hands inviting me in.

It made flowers each spring, for me,
light purple lilacs, sweet gentle perfume.
Tiny flowers joined into one sachet,
communing with their neighbors
on other branches,
lighting up the backyard.
I carried a few flowers inside,
climbed the counter for a vase,
and let the fragrance grow
from the kitchen table
to surprise mom
when she came home from work.

It was a village up there, millions
of small houses,
of dreams and wishes,
complete with roads, that led
Everywhere
I wanted to go.

ANNA MARIE STRYZ

I sat for hours,
swinging my suspended legs
hidden by the leaves
which shaded me from the sun
and the ground.

I watched the neighbors, the kids driving their cars,
a reality too far from my world,
as I imagined my life
when I would be that old, hoping for so much.
Each desire on a new flower
each prayer closer to the sky
we would touch, as soon as we grew.

Then, my parents spoke of putting
a pool in,
I was the happiest kid on the block

until I heard,
my tree must be cut.

I screamed, and swore
I would not leave
the tree's branches
when they came to cut
my friend to pieces.

Now I swim,
in the light fragrance
and shadow
of my tree
in my memory.

GEORGINA GATTO

LAURA

She brought out
The champagne chilled.
The street was hushed
Except for cricket
Chirps and the creaking
Of the swing with
Our legs dangling
In the warm, night air.
Her painted
Lips blew wisps
Of smoke, obsuring
Her angel
Hair in the dim
Orange porchlight.
She was a trembling
Moth in the darkness.
I wanted to hold
Her as I noted
Her fidgeting hands,
Her eyes troubled
By my stare.
I saw the bruises
On her legs.
We were careful
Not to wake her stepfather.

GEORGINA GATTO

That night, I wanted
To take her with me, into
A world she couldn't touch.
But instead, I took
The glass toasting,
With a wary clink,
Her leaving for college,
Her flight from
The strappings
Of her battered refuge.

She called me the other
Day, her voice thick
And raspy, hollow
With fleeting men
And nighttime bars.

MAGGIE KENNY

WHERE WE LIVE NOW

From here, reminders of home loom small,
recollection bound to the piece of land we called *mine*
before abandonment looked like the right thing
to do, before lapses in conversations
with those who love us still
made us believe half the fun
certainly lies in the getting there, then getting out.

I keep a list of *must remember*:
How my father and I sat
cross-legged on the forest floor
behind the house, the way
his fingers crafted circles
in heavy Wisconsin soil,
tiny constellations of seething--
I never took the life of a wild thing
I hunted out of reverence, not sport--
I have missed every time.

And the way my first-grade birdwatcher teacher
disclosed the means of seeking
that which is most graceful when it appears by chance.
Observe--the red-wing blackbird
wears his heart on his sleeve, instruction
I did not heed as Peter Shea and I
wandered from the group, would have kissed,
touched soft if we knew
the potential for getting lost existed.

In this life, the power to leave those
who have nothing to teach
stretches brand-new and generous
like bread crumbs far away
from weary stepmothers
who leave you for dead, never liked you anyway.
So strange, our means of looking back,
recognizing difference between here and there,
terrible, foreign bootprints in the snow
leading to the front door
of where we live now.

VALERIE ROSE FALES

THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

Money hauled hand over fist
Out of the ground and out of the country

Foreign Miners mining U.S. Federal Lands,
For forgotten gold, with new techniques
Under an 1872 law
The government has been slow to change
But suddenly wants to

(History repeats itself.
Trampling land from 1848-1859
From California to Canada and back to Colorado,
Hundreds of thousands, waves and waves
Of Non-Native Americans and other foreigners
Leaving havoc in their wake, gaping holes
And gold deep in the Earth.)

Connie Chung and the color television screen
Bring the mining rebirth right into my living-room

Big bulldozers
Scoop up mountains of earth
Leaving a dry barren hole
Circled only by stagnant red pools
Of Afterbirth,
Sentinels to the labor.

Once a Race of Red People
Were the only eyewitnesses
To the first wave of human gold-diggers,
Wondering when the rape of their Mother would stop.

Who will be left to bury the sacred umbilical cord
Send a prayer up for the children,
When the old one's body bears her last fruit?

CATHERINE WATERS

WASHDAY IN BESIKTAS, ISTANBUL

I wash our clothing in a blue round tub
in your tiled bathroom, squeezing the soap suds
from the wet dark material, rinsing
clean, with the hose, everything we wear.

And the dyes run together, the deep blues
and the reds send purpled water rushing
to the rusted drain. My wrinkled fingers
crimson from the cloth's ink and this hard work.

Just off your balcony, up five stories,
your clothes-line is strung with plastic clothes-pins
and all your thousands of neighbors' children
crowd and play in the narrow streets below.

Through open windows and over railings
of rear balconies, the voices of scarved
mothers and babies hang with the laundry
in this space between apartment buildings.

And what is it that makes me feel freedom
in this silent apartment as I clip--
like all women do--these colored layers
stripped from our bodies to a high white line?

VALERIE ROSE FALES

NATURE'S WAY

Night gently closes in, silver grey,
All around me,
Misty fingers close my eyes,
Gentle breath on my face,
As night stretches out,
Alongside me,
Dewy legs surround me,
Velvet darkness envelops me,
Stars burst;
Stealthily, creeping across the floor,
Morning comes,
Warm fingers,
Gently probe,
Every inch of my body,
Wrapping me in a golden glow,
Prying my eyelids open,
With a hot tongue.

MICHELLE TACKLA

CONTINENTAL DRIFT

I'm trying to reach you,
dialing, dialing... your voice

on the machine, across some ocean,
phone lines connecting.

Wires might hang me, a noose,
or wrap around my wrists

to mend, pulling the threads through
the seams insided of me.

But the cords are fraying,
snapping, one by one, with the days,

and I'm swapped, a human rope,
gripping with hands and feet,

sweating, slipping--trying to hold
two continents together.

SUSAN PRISE

CERAMIC SKELETONS

I spin and I spin
like the brown lump.
Upon you I place my hands,
working my fingers deep
into your flesh, which turns toward me
a face of gray innocence.

I touch you and turn you,
wrists aching with cold
and your weight, thick and dark
mysteriously changing form
as my eyes dip together
lulled, your throaty hum,
your scent unearthed so long ago.

Slowly you fall
before my eyes and hands of creation.
and you return
before I can dry your wet bones.
I push you all the way down,
Your flesh yielding to my dry bones again.

JESSICA EVE HUMPHREY

SPEAKING SUNFLOWERS

"I believe in leaps of faith."

"You don't make them very easily."

"Maybe that's why I believe in them."

Ben always has to remind me to find the point in any conversation. I seem to wander, finding every detail fascinating, necessary, until I forget what the object of our conversation was.

I was speaking bytes about sunflowers. It doesn't work, you have to speak sunflowers in rain or yellows. Except he knew what I meant, almost. There's always that silver space of almost when you're talking.

You know—the gap that doesn't quite sing the whole song, but almost. I can understand hermits who won't talk. I sometimes don't ever want to say another thing, because it will only almost be heard.

Except sometimes there isn't a point, entirely focused on why or what. Sometimes it's just the song in duet that counts. I think he knew that, because he said something about leaps of faith.

MICHAEL JAMES

COW TIPPING

The driver, Tappan,
Flipped the meter
And we barreled
Into Delhi.
Claudia, Jen and I
Were looking
For all-night
Curry.
Tappan turned
And strained
His neck
For quick glimpses
Of blond hair
And blue eyes.
Tappan's ancestor
Stepped from the curb.
The taxi headlights
Pierced cow eyes,
Frozen
On the sandy
Pavement.
Tappan plowed through,
Knocking Bessie down
With an elongated
Moo-ooo-ooo.
It was like West
Virginian
High Schoolers
Getting pastoral
Jollies on Saturdays.
Tappan swooped
Toward the fender,
Poised and in control
As he began
CPR.

MICHELLE COLLINS

ME AT MY FINEST

complete with insanity
and charity
i live
to give
myself.
yet the self
i give
is the
bits and pieces
i've
picked up
from others.
others'
for sure
so my own is iffy
and myself
unsure
(therefore)
i give
parts of others
to others
who
i
only know
in parts
(and therefore)

MICHELLE COLLINS

i
am
a vessel
through which
others'
stuff can live
and if
the same
holds true
for all
(then)
i as
myself
am only whole
in the parts
of others
who've
picked up
my bits and pieces
and saved them
in complete
insanity.

SHABAZZ WILSON

WINDS

As I laid
in the field
with the grass
against my back,
I heard the voices
of plants and animals and people.

They sang a song
of all that lived
and stood silent
for those
that didn't

I closed my eyes
and embraced my soul
as the winds
covered me.

As I laid
in the field
with the grass against my back,
I sang a song
of all that lived,
and remained silent
for those
that had gone.

I wondered
into the hovering distance

SHABAZZ WILSON

above lands and places
I once knew,
and felt the touch
of blue and green and clear
waters.

And carried the weight
of birds and critters
and felt the warmth
of the sun
and the coldness
without.

I laid
in the field
with the grass
against my back
and my soul ready
for flight.

I go where they may take me,
and listen when my mind permits me
to the voices hidden
of that gone and present

I am haunted by winds.

VALERIE ROSE FALES

VICTORIAN LACE

The tree lay on the ground
Where it had fallen,
One with the imprint
It had made.

It must have been old.
Big, long, wide,
The bark was rough,
With deep cracks in it.

But growing all along its side
Where rows of frothy,
White edged lace
Rich with maroons and browns
On the inside,
Layered like a woman's petticoat
Ancient, Antique,
Ruffled and rippled,
A little stiff to the touch
As though freshly starched.
A little waxy feeling.

The tree lived again,
Just beginning to decay.

CATHERINE WATERS

ARMS

When my mother's one-handed cousin comes,
together they make Italian hard biscuits
from dough dashed with fennel seeds.
Anne's knuckled fingers and her left elbow's
round tip--unsleeved and pasted in flour--
knead, flattening, rolling on the waxed paper
the dough into soft fleshy lines like arms.
She was born that way, and never married,
but shows us pictures of herself as a bridesmaid,
her shoulder hiding behind another girl's,
whose long lilting arms are gloved in white.
Since Anne has moved from the neighborhood
into the senior citizens' home, my mother--
her children grown--leaves the house
on Saturdays to take her cousin grocery shopping
or to the drugstore.

Today, Anne in the kitchen
of our home, crowded with my mother's
husband and children and grandchildren,
has come again to work this seeded dough--
to press it, yielding beneath her elbow--
to make biscuits for my father, waiting.
She and my mother draw each strip in
upon itself, looping it, pulling its ends
together, knotted, like soft hands folding.

MATT CLARK

GILDED

Her skin was like the cold
gold of leafed altars. Its pigments
roll and shudder with touch,
as nerves respond to stimuli.

She crept in as gently as dew
on a blade. Soft and sweet nectar
opening my lips like a bee's leg.
I could see myself gather

her pollen in, taking my fill.
Sticking it to my back
leg and carrying it miles away
to mother.

After all is said, it's all about
control. Weighing myself down
with sticky yellow pleasure, I fall
between the blades.

OREST HOLUBEC

TRUE COMFORT

Through the leaves the sun kind of looks
at me knowing that I am more in
the leaves than the sun but smilingly
knowing that I would not see said leaves
where it not for her power.

Doesn't matter. I try to ignore her much like
I would ignore a rip in underwear not many
will see or a defect in something inexpensive
like a pen or a lighter. Unfortunately, she
is as easy to ignore as a bad rash

so I look up to her, she hurts my eyes
but I always look, and yes, I look again.
Ouch, that hurt. I wonder if it
is worth it. So I look a little to the left
and see none of her beauty but I am

taken by all of Her power. I can't look
any more so my eyes close and I rest
my head in her almost lap. The leaves fall.
It looks like I lose again but that's
OK because I'm really really warm.

MICHELLE TACKLA

THE PENNY AT THE BOTTOM

Your eyes are two swimming pools --
Summer fever, that first hot day.

The sun is smitten, and water frolics,
clacks its heels together, hollers, "yahoo!"

It's those kids laughing,
plunging belly first from diving boards

into delirious light, white-hot,...
tingling, as my back sweats.

I reach for the Copper-
tone, the scent mingling

with musty chlorine.
I crouch down, dazzled at the brink

of (yours, each) an Island of skies.
My gaze dreams into blue-green...

Hey there! I spy a penny.
It's wavering at the bottom, and smiling,

I wish, breath held, to wrap fingers
~~around this treasure, -in~~ your eyes,--

as my toe is about to touch
the knife-white
surface of that deep
and gregarious water.

JOHN KOVATCH

I 2 AND IGNORANT

i guess i was happy once
when daddy stopped yelling
at me for doing things
he said caused momma to start
talking to herself

i guess it was when i
started staring too much
between the falling
leaves that caused me
to laugh in the direction
of the man who had
caught his fingers in
the car door

i tried to close my eyes
and feel the wail
he was making and decided
that momma made this sound
when i was being defied
of my opinion to be born

JEFF ZAGST

FAR FROM BED

My pumping legs stirred
Like the dark sky
Over Sterling Drive.
While through my head
My father's warning
Rang like a fire whistle:
If your tricycle gets wet,
It will rust
And fall apart.

When the drops began
To speckle the sidewalk,
My sunken stomach turned
Into a sack of worms.
My quivering legs locked
The whirring wheel,
Tipping the tricycle,
And smashing my forehead
On the front steps of home.
Blood dripped down
Faster than the rain,
Blending with the trike's
Lustrous red paint.

So there I laid,
My dizzy head resting
On a warm cement pillow,
Cuddling in my arms
My wrecked tricycle,
Light fading,
Ears ringing,
And the gentle rain
Kissing,
Goodnight, son.

CHRISTINE DRESCH

HURRY UP PLEASE, IT'S TIME

Neon beer cans crackling above the bar cast
ultra-violet silhouettes upon the tile floor.
The bartender buffs a beer mug. Purple haze
embraces his balding skull.

One of the men squatting upon the greasy stools sips his beer
while she passes.

Grimy fingernails clutch the thick glass handle.

She slumps into the corner booth. Obscenities gouge the
wooden table.

Her feet prop upon the opposite seat, cowboy boots crossing
at the ankles.

Shadows cloak her legs and her thighs.

Silver triangles cover the black leather toes, flashing
violet into her eyes.

Like aluminum foil crushed beneath fists,
the road buckles beneath the downpour.

ANNA MARIE STRYZ

RUN, STRANGER

As I run down the side road
the southern heat and moisture mixes
with my drained body's sweat.
The trees canopy above
and spanish moss hangs motionless
from the strong, quiet branches.

I am ready to slow it down,
as the twilight sky darkens
sending me to the finish line.
I stretch my legs out,
step, by step.
Pushing the ground behind me,
slow but strong.
I feel my heart's beat
in my head,
my chest,
my hands,
my legs,
I control it,
slow it down
slower.

ANNA MARIE STRYZ

Stop.

A rustle in the bush,
a few steps ahead.

I meet the dark
eyes, bursting from the shadow.

I want to scream out,
but it captures and stuns
my voice.

I want to scare it, but lose the battle.

So finally, I
settle
and reach my newly-
tamed hand
out

but the deer finishes
its evening run.

MICHELLE COLLINS

PLEASE

Please find my
hidden inner room
and drop in for tea.

2 lumps,
no, only one,
no, maybe three.

Sugar, sugar, sugar,
darling,
drink up--drink me,
for your appetite
is fading
and so is sobriety.

So listen then,
tea black,
black as can be,
forget about
my hidden room--

Please throw away
the key.

MARCELLUS D. NEALY

RAPING ON A TOKYO COMMUTER

The trainman's whistle screams into the humidity
and steps up the pace of work-bound feet
in their usual morning rush.

A hired pusher squarely places his palms
on the bottoms of business suits
and gives the forward thrust
that always throws the whole car a little off balance.

The loud sliding sound of doors coming together
starts the whole anxious load
on its window-pressed journey
into the center of the city.

For thirty or forty minutes
stranger embraces stranger,
countless dozens are frozen
in mid-kiss.

Into the loop of a two armed hug
younggirlssilentlycry
while
 oldmen
 andyoungmen
 unnoticed smile.

At each station new bodies force themselves
through the tightness.
New tears fall into the thousand-legged abyss
where wily hands disappear
and male flies make the zig-zagged most
of a bumpy ride.

JEFF ZAGST

ENQUIRER

We catch you peering back at us
From across the check-out line,
Captured in black and white infamy:
LION BABY BORN TO HUMAN MOTHER.

So I browse for clues
To your ridiculous feline body,
And discover the tragic mixup
That occurred at the sperm bank,
Left unnoticed until your roaring
Announced you in the delivery room.

A few millennia ago and somewhere else,
We would have celebrated your birth,
Carved statues of your mythical dichotomy,
And struggled to solve your puzzles.
But today I return you to the rack,
Your fleeting enticement extinguished,

Except in the lonely eyes
of my grandmother,
Who pays seventy-five cents,
Hoping your riddle will last
A little while longer.

MATT CLARK

MILLER'S TRAILER PARK

As the *Titanic* sank she rose
up into life. Playing ball
with me when I was supposed
to be sick in bed, sneaking
the cold vegetables off my plate
when mom was washing the dishes.

She was there for us.
Her brown hair slowly turning
silver as I watched her reheat
some hamburger in the small kitchen
of her mobile home. I always tried
to grab the hitch on the front
and move the lifeless tires,
taking Grandma home or just away
from this lonely desert of wrought
iron awnings and pineapple lamps.

HELEN BARNA

THE CALL

funerals are lies

listen
observe

the life and death of the unfortunate
is covered over like the grave
fresh flowers strewn ever so delicately
to hide unpleasant facts

it's true
we loved each other once
she was the mythical, entrancing bride in gauzy gown
I matched her in tailored handsomeness

there was a flamboyant gaiety
at this beginning
and we followed it
with what we thought were miraculous births
fabulous beings, phenomenal and astounding

we believed this
and wore our pride
as pinned or ribboned aristocracy

HELEN BARNA

in time love withered
in time she died
the burial was proper
in proper time I married

now time
wearing a cunning clown smile
mocks me

come to my rendezvous, I say
cloaking it with romantic overtone
knowing we are all a fiction
and must outplay the play we are in

we will bar the door
and audition who we are

DAVID HUMPHRIES

CEMETERY WORKER

When I was a child,
they explained that my shoulder blades
were angel wings, waiting
to grow. With my beliefs, I would rise
into the sky.

I have not flown.
Today, the sky, low and broken,
squats on the fingers of the angels--
the angels are soot-stained
and made of old grey stone.

My mornings are born blind
from the empty hole
of my stomach. The day is a journey
of various hungers; I am thankful
for the blank expanse of night.

Love was my first religion;
lopsided, though, it tipped
my desire into the mystery of another.
Later, the dreamless nights
were my best protection.

DAVID HUMPHRIES

The daytime slaps my eyes.
But I want to reach like the stone angels,
only higher. I want to fix the broken clouds
and pull back the promises
from the other side of the sky.

The children fling themselves
from the steps of my tenement
with their arms spread. They call it flying.
In the air, they can believe
for half a moment.

I am accustomed to not dying.
But today I want to know my own life
again. I want to fling myself
and revive my desires.
I will put faces on my dreams tonight.

JEFF ZAGST

GRANDFATHER REVIVAL

My grandfather lies supine
in a wooden display case,
his Revlon-preserved corpse
like a supermarket selection of beef.
Some who know his face say
that *it doesn't even look like him*,
while Aunt Gloria remarks on the good
job *they did with his body*, injected with enough formaldehyde
to make his frail physique appear
like it did a quarter-century ago.

But I imagine his warm smile cracking
through that rosy-peach lipstick,
him waking up and thinking
that he had just fallen
asleep for an evening
in his flower bed.
Did I just see him breathe?
Dressed in his best Sunday suit,
shiny wing-tips, and slicked back hair,
he's ready to waltz the box step again,
on the mahogany dance floor at his feet.

IOANNA GIATIS

HOLDING ONTO NOTHING

You toss hypnotizing looks across
this vacant room, and I am sinning
by showing you I still want your touch.
You say I always was a daring cliff,
as you hang on by a strand of my hair.
And you call my mind brilliant and bold,
my soul a loving tool, but for today
I stand in front of you, a lying fool
as I insist on having you by my lips,
but I know I am holding on to nothing.

GEORGINA GATTO

MY MOTHER LIKES THE OPERA

My mother likes the opera,
Elaborate ermine-trimmed gowns,
Peacock fans and trilling sopranos.
Surrounded by the darkness,
She leaves herself behind.
Sometimes, her black-
Laced body recedes like
The ocean crests during
The symphony until she's
Engulfed by the resonating
Cello, with its mourning sound,
A golden dirge.
Somehow, she feels better.
I know she's tired of the dull
Drone of the dryer and the washing
Machine and the sound of my brothers'
Screaming and yelling splitting
The air, pinpricking her neck
And back that aches from baskets.
On Mondays, she goes to foreign
Films, returning flushed, and talks
To me, as if she were in love
Again, her words pulsating
With visions.

JAMES MAGNER

FOR MY SON, JIM, WHEN I HAVE GONE AWAY

I will be there, my son,
as then, in the dark of room,
with you upon my heart,
you talked to me
and told me of the sorrows
of the day
and the feed-back of the world
that migrained your mike of mind.
Though beneath, in the dark of box,
I will be there, in the dark of your room,
the dark of your heart,
and will listen in your speaking
awake in your words,
for love is not bound to box
or dark or room;
it bears itself in your own speaking,
it weaves itself in your own yearning.
So now, this night, abed,
do not be afraid,
for life is thy keeping
and I am
forever
awake.

DAVID HUMPHRIES

DIVISION STREET

1.

Where do the tires come from?

They assemble in the vacant lots
and their faded black carcasses
rise in low, swelling mounds.

The weeds are patient contortionists,
growing through the rubber hoops,
poking green leaves upwards
as more and more tires appear
during the violent summer nights.

2.

I know that it is more dangerous
when the strangers sense your hunger,
but I keep my appetite in my eyes.

I always stare at the house-burnings
that flare during the bleak, long nights
near Division Street.

The firemen are resigned and cautious;
they know that no one cares
about these houses anymore,
except maybe the strange
insurance agents from out of town.

3.

The last steel mill burns green flames
into the summer night, and the clouds shimmer
with a power that seems almost evil.

No one complains about the choking smoke,
and it floats through the valley like a memory.

DAVID HUMPHRIES

4.

The Mahoning River is patient and slow.
It accepts the flakes of rust and trash,
rubs away the old concrete bridges,
and flows all night with its murky brown secrets.

5.

I have lived near Division Street all my life,
and I have never seen a light in the old
Youngstown Sheet and Tube Building.

With so many windows, so many eyes,
couldn't anyone have seen this rusty bridge,
this future of green, shimmering nights?

6.

I don't care if the strangers see my hunger.

I have learned from the patient river,
and the blind eyes of the buildings,
and the silent firemen,
and even the angry, shimmering clouds.

We all have our secret,
the secret that keeps the weeds twisting upwards
through the tires that accumulate mysteriously,
during the long, blazing nights.

GREGG M. GASCON

THE BIG EMPTY

The first thing you notice
is the audible
appearance of the
season's birds, perpetual

Marrow-chill flown far north. The
shortest days in the
nation are lengthened
again, morings stark like

The language. Spring has sprung in
North Dakota, where
suspended ceremonies
are ended for the winter

Dead, their frozen bodies
stacked neatly in
concrete bunkers, waiting
for the ground to thaw.

TANYA GROSSNER

MASQUE

We are all dreaming insomniacs
in Halloween costumes
strutting our stuff and baring
our souls through disguise.
We yawn and laugh and tremble.
We throw back vodka and candy corn
and kiss each other's bare
white arms, our waving throats.
The dance is a jangle
and we see the orange
in our eyes; the black teems
around in streamers.
But we are dreaming.
We are dancing in a circle
of our hidden thoughts,
separate atoms of unrest.

DAVID HUMPHRIES

RESURRECTIONS

Introduction:

Every resurrection begins with a death.

Each cleverness clutters;
witticisms sputter, I try to speak,
and circle instead.

World (you)
World
I am filled with blood
even when I am not bleeding;
can you remember me that way?

(The World and its lust for blood,
the only way the World remembers.)

I want to send light flashing,
to speak like fireflies;
but I speak in words instead;
the breath held inside
demands release.

Then:
Resurrection hurts:
to stifle dreams and jerk stiff joints
and die again.
(Lazarus died twice)
Walking hurts;
away from the faces of our dreams.

The warmth of waking alive
from the embrace of death's second self
can only come from the face of a lover;

DAVID HUMPHRIES

Alone, the day begins cold, with hunger,
a hole, a long climb to cast off
the cloak of dreams;
another search between sleep.

Listen:
We all learn
from our resurrection plans.

Speak, world (you)
tell me how to rise,
tell me how you are alive.

Also:
I went to Croatia to see the spectacle
of the sun and the teeming tortures
of resurrecting;
for that I was ashamed.

The ferry, rocking, the smell of salt,
and across from me the precise pock marks
of bullet scars along the soldier's legs.

He shrugged over his crutches.
Grey hair, grey eyes, he caught my stare;

I am not ashamed any more;
I wake sometimes into his eyes.

We never spoke, but his secret falls
like a star;
he rose by finding faces in the clouds.

DAVID HUMPHRIES

The Chatterbox:

The chatterbox is also
the place in the basement,
near the furnace,
a small place,
where I waited
and watched the furnace flame,
blue,
light, die, flare again;
a small place where I watched
the tiny light,
where I waited
to go upstairs
and be pained again.

(Every resurrection begins with a death
and ends with the weight of remembrance:
Lazarus, upon rising, carried the weight
of dying.)

The Night:

It is not the gloomy night of the moon
that frightens me, or days so dry I have
to swallow twice before I can spit
into both eyes of my executioner;

What frightens me is when I swallow the night
and carry it around inside the devices
of my mind.

That is the sleepy tease of death.
(But every resurrection begins with a death.)

DAVID HUMPHRIES

Another resurrection story:
When I wake empty with the night
captured inside of me,
I wake again
to the rocking of the ferry;

We are all filled with blood.
The heart knows that
and needs nothing more clever.

Resurrect:
When you wake
dead with the night still
inside of you,
wake again
(into the soldier's eyes)
and fill the hole of hunger;

Remember beyond the consonant
beat of blood and ask to be fed
a patient, waking story;

Read:
In the sky, sincerely;
see in the clouds the faces
of all your lovers,
spilling,
bleeding out of dreams.

CATHERINE WATERS

DYING

He has tended this piece of ground all summer.
His teenage son, shirtless on afternoons
in heat, walked evenly in straight lines,
mowing, to keep the grass clipped and thick-haired.
And in the evenings, the man's hands rested
upon the browned thick-rolled flesh of his hips,
as he watched the sprinkler, frantic, ticking
there, pulsing water upon his green lawn.

Now October, my yard--
across the street from his--
is bloodied with the trees' shedding.
They mature, their red layers flowing down
upon us, to dry soon to brown, to shred
underneath our feet on sidewalks and lawns
by November. The sun beats on his greying back,
as he labors among the swirling leaves,
driving them, confused, into the sewer,
refusing the blood and beauty of dying.

And golden hands keep falling from the maple
that reaches its many arms over him,
etching quick the cool and slow-dying ground
in terse gold-leaf patterns the wind chooses.

SARAH MORTON

MASTERS

Four students sit in a row of chairs, facing front. A separate spotlight shines on each. The Professor stands at a podium, stage left. While the students are aware of each others' presence, they do not directly acknowledge one another. Their focus remains outward.

Student One: What I'm seeing is a mediation between ideologies, a decided ambivalence if you will.

Student Two: What I'm seeing is an irresolution of opposing viewpoints, culminating in a textual implosion, a radical fragmentation of form.

Student Three (over "form"): What I'm seeing is a simultaneous configuring slash disfiguring of narrative technique which unleashes an inter and intratextual struggle for autonomy.

Student Four (over "for"): What I'm seeing is a regendering of the protagonist by way of the re parentheses construction of quote unquote gender tropes, signified by the recurrent emphasis on bodily display or dis hyphen play. (*Pause.*)

Professor: Yes.

One: The other possibility is a con parentheses fusion of dis hyphen similar similarities--

Two: The fe slash male quote unquote ness or wo parentheses man ness that is in part a con hyphen struct and slash or construct--

SARAH MORTON

Three: The dis double slash italicized simulation quote
unquote--

Four: The quote unquote self hyphen optional re parentheses
ferential versus the re parentheses slash ferential.

Two: Metonymy at odds with autonomy.

Four: Misogyny with androgyny.

Three: Fiction with friction.

One: Aesthetic with prosthetic. (*A loud buzzer goes off.*) I...I
mean...

Professor: I'm sorry. (*Spotlight fades on ONE. Spotlights
grow brighter on the three remaining students.*) Continue.

Two: It's like Marx always said,

Three: It's like Freud always said,

Four: It's like Foucault always said,

Two: It's like Lacan always said,

Three: It's like Kant always said,

Four: It's like Barthes always said,

Two: It's like Goethe always said,

Three: It's like Derrida always said,

SARAH MORTON

Four: It's like Sartre always said,

Two: It's like T.S. Eliot always said,

Four: It's like I.A. Richards always said,

Three: It's like Jerry Lewis always said...(Buzzer.) Not Jerry Lewis! I meant C.S. Lewis! C.S. Lewis!

Professor: I'm sorry.

Three: No wait! I meant *Leavis*. F. R. Leavis! IT'S LIKE F. R. LEAVIS ALWAYS SAID! IT'S LIKE-- (*Spotlight fades on THREE and grows even brighter on TWO and FOUR*).

Professor: Continue.

Two: It's like you were saying in the article you wrote--

Four: "Foucault, Faustus, and the Formation of the Fab Four: Having Fun with the 'F' Word."

Two: Or "Who Put the Anus in Coriolanus? Shakespeare's Male Bimbos."

Four: Or "On Joyce's Use of Commas: Yet Another Petty Quibble."

Two: Or "Mimesis and Reproduction: Okay, So I Plagiarized This Article."

Four: Your dissertation--

Two: I've memorized it.

SARAH MORTON

Four: Backwards!

Two: In Latin!

Four: ".erehwemos sniatnoc yldetbuodnu levon siht taht
snoitacilpmi lacigoloedi, larutcurts, laciitlop, lacigoloicos eht
enimaxe ot nigeB ew nac derewsna era snoitseuq eseht nehW
ylnO."

Two: Uh ... hic haec hoc. Huius, huius, huius, amo, amas,
amat...(Buzzer.)

Professor: I'm sorry.

Two: I know it! Just give me a second! (*Spot begins to fade on
TWO.*) Please wait! Please! (*TWO steps into FOUR'S spot and
breaks into a tap dance. FOUR stands and begins to undress.
This action continues under dialogue.*) This is probably going
to sound stupid....

Four: Can I run this idea by you sometime?

Two: I definitely don't mean to contradict you.

Four: I'd really like to get some feedback from you.

Two: Am I doing okay?

Four: I value your input.

Two: Maybe I should drop out.

Four: This is the only thing that matters to me.

SARAH MORTON

Two: Did you hear what I said?

Four: Don't get me wrong.

Two: Should I drop out?

Four: It's not the grades. (*Spotlight begins to shrink, edging TWO into darkness.*)

Two: Hello? (*TWO vanishes.*)

Four: It's the learning. (*Pause. FOUR stands, naked and shivering in the spotlight.*) It's the mastery.

Blackout.

END

CHRISTINE DRESCH

TILTING AT WINDMILLS

"I know my fate. One day there will be associated with my name the recollection of something frightful--of a crisis like no other on earth. I have a terrible fear I shall one day be pronounced holy: one will guess why I bring out this book beforehand; it is intended to prevent people from making mischief with me. I do not want to be a saint--rather even a buffoon...Perhaps I am a buffoon."

--Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*

VILLA SILBERBLICK-WEIMAR, GERMANY, 1898

Alwine, the maid, interrupted mid-morning coffee. A small, sallow woman, she blanched against the mahogany of the heavy bedroom door. Flaxen hair swept her shoulders. She had worked as the family servant for nearly twenty years.

"Herr Kruse," she said, reddening, "please pardon my interruption. Frau Doktor is ready for you in the day room." She coughed. Her thin hand grasped the doorknob behind her. "When you are finished with your breakfast, of course."

Setting down the china teacup, Max Kruse pressed a napkin to his lips. He brushed it over his face and shoulders, shaking biscuit crumbs from his thick red beard. Coffee had sloshed over the lace tablecloth--lilies and doily cherubs stained tobacco brown. He folded the napkin over the spill.

Extracting himself from the chair, he stretched before the bedroom window. He parted the white curtains and admired once more the landscape spread below him. Nestled among the hilltops, the Villa Silberblick enjoyed a breathtaking view of the surrounding countryside. Treetops molted during the interim between thunderstorms. Hunch-backed peasants plodded through soggy fields. As Kruse watched, the sun dashed between black clouds. Mud puddles ignited like feldspar chips in soft patches of green down. Plow blade scars drained into the dirt roadway

CHRISTINE DRESCH

winding towards Weimar, the city where Goethe, also, has spent his final years. The road, scratched by carriage wheels, disappeared between slate roofs. The tips of olive trees tapped against the window pane. Up slope, behind the Archives, the old Dutch windmill twisted undoubtedly.

Kruse retrieved his smock from the guest cabinet. A lion, an eagle, and a serpent writhed upon the cabinet doors. These were the animals of Zarathustra, Frau Widow had explained, the noble companions of her brother's fictitious prophet. The significance of the design escaped most visitors. She expected her dedications would soon change that.

Frau Widow Doktor Elisabeth Forster-Nietzsche reappeared in her mother's household in Naumburg after the death of her husband, the German nationalist Doktor Bernhard Forster. The newlywed couple had emigrated to Paraguay to establish the colony of Nueva Germania, struggling for five years with administration. In 1889, the German government accused Forster of fraud. He responded with suicide. Elisabeth's brother--concerned about her well-being, she'd said--had violently objected to Forster. Professor Nietzsche had been conspicuously absent from the small wedding ceremony.

Peter Gast, a longtime friend of the professor, had been planning a collected edition of Nietzsche's published works, along with the release of some unpublished notebooks. But when Elisabeth returned to Naumburg, she requested her mother surrender to her control of her brother's literary estate. She then founded the Nietzsche Archives in Weimar.

Her brother's wandering decades following his resignation from the University of Basel were tracked, acquaintances located and interviewed, and pertinent information recorded in the Archive's manuscripts. Gast's sharp black script, dissecting the professor's painfully scrawled philosophy, overran bookcases and table tops. After the death of their mother Franziska last year, Elisabeth had her

CHRISTINE DRESCH

brother transported from Naumburg to Weimar. And every night, Kruse watched the crooked gold-framed silhouette of Elisabeth Forster-Nietzsche stretch across the hillside, hunched over her brother's notebooks and the broken shadows of olive branches.

An upper floor included the day room and private chambers of the professor and Frau Widow. Isolated from the activity of lower floors, serenity was carefully maintained there. The day room was spacious with a high ceiling, and was papered deep crimson. Italian veils drifted across red velvet furniture. A grand piano glimmered in the light from the veranda, flanked by enormous ferns. The professor had once possessed considerable musical talent, composing melodies and concertos during spare moments. Now, a bust of the late Doktor Forster glared from atop the instrument.

They waited for Kruse at the far end of the dining table, encircled by the usual clutter. Breakfast manuscripts had been shoved aside for a small pot of honey and a half-eaten bowl of blueberries. Frau Widow smiled and nodded when she spotted him, brushing tight curls from her face. She pulled a spoon from her brother's fingers as Kruse quietly approached the pair.

"Look, Fritz," she crooned. "You remember Herr Max Kruse, the sculptor?"

The philosopher stared at the floor.

Directed by Frau Widow, Kruse slowly extended his hand.

The professor shuddered, as if stirred from sleep. Thick eyebrows pinched, rumpling the forehead. His arm lifted from the shoulder, elbow and wrist folded. The hand dangled until Kruse cradled it between his. Purple and green veins stained the skin.

"Good afternoon, Professor," Kruse said.

The fingers twitched.

Alwine appeared in the doorway. "Herr Schmacher has arrived, Frau Doktor," she announced. "Herr Seidl welcomes him downstairs."

CHRISTINE DRESCH

"Fritz must be moved so the good Herr Kruse may continue his work," Frau Widow replied. "Arthur knows to bring Schmacher here."

Alwine kept the plaster plastic-wrapped on a rolling cart. Kruse steered the cart from its shadowy corner while the maid tugged a red velvet armchair before the veranda. Frau Widow waited while Kruse unwrapped the bust. She smiled when she saw it. "Perfect, Herr Kruse," she sighed. "It's going to be just perfect."

Alwine wheeled the silent professor across the room. The sudden daylight startled him. He tried to shield his eyes, but, unable to raise his hand above his shoulders, slammed it down on the maid's fingers. "Llamal" he whimpered.

Frau Widow excused herself.

Kruse scrutinized the bust. Neither the vaulting forehead or the stout jaw needed further shaping. Hair fell across the skull like a breaking wave. Thick eyebrows shrouded the deep-set eyes. The nose reminded Kruse of Bismarck. Some flare needed to be erased from the nostrils, he noted. The overgrown mustache had frustrated Kruse for days.

Frau Widow fed her brother blueberries. She cooed and caressed, popping berries into his mouth to stifle screams. The professors's eyes rolled beneath their swollen lids. Kruse noticed the milky caste of distorted pupils.

Early in January 1889, while walking in the Piazza Carlo Alberto in the Italian city of Turin, Nietzsche had witnessed the flogging of a stubborn coach-horse by its driver. Rushing sobbing to the beaten animal, he collapsed embracing it. When he recovered consciousness, he was no longer sane. The doctors attributed the breakdown to metasyphilitic infection of the central nervous system. Thinking such a diagnosis slanderous, Elisabeth insisted the chloral hydrate her brother had taken against migraines and insomnia destroyed his brain. But however disputed the origin of the affliction, no one disputed its progression.

The professor soon quieted. He didn't protest when

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Alwine replaced a blanket thrown to the floor. Folding his hands, he kissed his sister on the cheek. Frau Widow wiped away tears and blueberry juice. "Llama," he mumbled happily.

Herr Arthur Seidl, Frau Widow's most recent chief editor, entered the room, wire eyeglasses clipped to his nose. Herr Schmacher accompanied him, taller and younger, carrying a paper roll. Frau Widow embraced the pair, greeting Schmacher warmly. Seidl distanced himself. His sullen eyes swept Kruse, lingered upon the professor, and followed Alwine from the room. Pulling a handkerchief from his pants pocket, he daubed his forehead.

Frau Widow implored Kruse to join them. He obliged, wiping his hands upon his smock. She encircled his waist with her arm as he neared. Her long black skirt dusted his boots. She introduced Herr Friedrich Schmacher as one of Germany's most ambitious young artists. "Herr Schmacher has designed for me an Archive memorial," she explained to Kruse, squeezing his arm.

Bowing, Schmacher offered Kruse his design. "Your criticism would honor me, Herr Kruse."

Turning towards the veranda to mask any first impression, Kruse unrolled the paper. Schmacher's charcoal sketch placed a round Grecian temple upon a plateau. A muscular figure straddled the temple dome, embracing the surrounding heights. Giants writhing in fetters formed the first circular step towards the temple entrance. Their faces were trampled and beaten to create a stable foothold. Schmacher had paid extra attention to the veins bulging from their necks.

Kruse peered over the top of the paper at the professor. The professor had fallen asleep, mouth gaping, head slumped to his shoulder. Daylight bleached his skin. Alwine carefully propped the still body with pillows. Kruse rerolled the design. "Wonderful, Herr Schmacher," he said, still with his back to the artist. "Truly a memorial worthy of the legend crafted here."

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Kruse returned the roll to Schmacher. The young blond artist accepted his work with another bow. Kruse avoided his blue-eyed gaze.

"Someday the memorial will make a magnificent addition to these Archives," Frau Widow sighed. "We are planning so much--a library, cloisters, an auditorium where young German scholars will further develop this new philosophy."

"Yes, magnificent," remarked Seidl, buffing his wire eyeglasses. "What a pity we have no money."

"Money," said Frau Widow coldly, "does not concern me. There exists a benefactor who will be inspired by my work, who will anoint this villa with his generosity and elevate it beyond anything I could have imagined."

Seidl raised his eyeglasses to the light. He sneered. "You've run these Archives for years on the shadow of this benefactor."

"My brother's royalties could sustain the Archives quite nicely if you could manage to translate a few of his manuscripts, Herr Seidl."

"I wouldn't struggle with your brother's manuscripts if you hadn't dismissed Herr Gast, Frau Doktor Forster."

Kruse's plaster-caked palms began to itch, drowning out the argument. Rubbing his hands together, he watched Herr Schmacher approach the sleeping professor. The young artist knelt before the velvet armchair. The charcoal etching creased his thigh. Schmacher pressed Nietzsche's limp knuckles to his forehead. Then, raising his head, he kissed the emaciated palm. Kruse could not hear Schmacher's greeting, but he very distinctly saw Schmacher mouth the word "Zarathustra."

Silence settled over the day room. The group waited for Schmacher to rejoin them.

"You must be hungry, Herr Schmacher," Frau Widow said. "Lunch waits for us downstairs. Of course, you, too, are invited to dine with us, Herr Kruse."

Kruse shook his head. "I'm afraid I must refuse. I

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would very much like to continue my work, thank you."

Kruse watched the group depart, listening to their footsteps echo down the stairwell. Wood moaned beneath their heels. Alwine began to clear the blueberries from the breakfast table.

Forster's plaster silhouette cast a long shadow across the face of the unfinished bust. Kruse removed the Doktor's bust from the piano, placing it beneath a potted fern before returning to his seat.

The professor was awake. His glare pierced Kruse. Kruse froze, mouth dry. Blind, marbleized eyes bored into him.

"Did I really write a few good books?" Nietzsche asked.

Kruse nervously scanned the room for Alwine. The maid had gathered dishes and honey and had disappeared. But the professor's eyes clouded over again before the sculptor's search had ended. Blueberry juice bruised his cheek.

Shaken, Kruse wiped his trembling hands upon his trousers.

MATTHEW WATSON

CITY HOTEL

(for D.N)

Please forgive me if I begin this way, with hesitation. But I know of no other way to begin. How should I begin? How does one begin? How does one form his beginning, open this, these, topics? These monologues. So I will begin at the beginning, what is perhaps for you the end, the final page of the book, the close, the resolution. But which for me is only the prologue, the preface, what for me neither closes nor resolves anything. You must understand I am not like you. I am different. I must construct myself here. I must compose, recompose my life here. I must create for the second time with words what I may have once created already. Perhaps, then, I am not different

1

I came here because I wanted to be alone. I came here because I am sick. I came here because I am dying and none of those people will let me die in peace. That is what I want really. To die. To die in peace. To die away from those people, those premature mourners. Those who anticipate my passing, who anticipate my death. I cannot sit and watch them wait. This place is called City Hotel. It is where the welfare people send drunks to dry out, and where they send dirty old men who are thrown out by their families. But I was not thrown out. I walked out of that door, as I have walked into this one. This place is clean, but otherwise it is filthy. When the woman brings me up here, I can hear her smelling. Smelling me for alcohol, no doubt. She doesn't smell any, unless she has smelled so much of it for so many filthy years that she smells it on every elderly man she meets. She gives me the key to the room, and I close the door. The room is cold and bare, but I don't care. I take several days worth of old and worn clothes from a suitcase and put them

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into the drawers of a battered and scarred bureau. I take a framed picture from the suitcase and set it on the table by the window. It is a picture of them. The woman I am married to. The son and the daughter that we produced together. It is a picture of a family. I even brought them here with me where I have come to escape them. Get them away from me, but don't take them away. Maybe this makes me selfish. But I can't be sure. Not anymore. Maybe they would want what I want. And maybe there is now only time for what I want.

I begin to cough while I look at the picture. I cough into the handkerchief that I carry in my pocket, and this time, like other times before, when I am done coughing, there is blood on the white cloth. They tell me I have cancer. They tell me it is in my stomach, but I'm not sure that I believe them. Often it is in my chest, or my legs, or my lungs, or my head. Oftentimes every part of me hurts, but most times it is my stomach. My stomach is a nest of rats. They nibble and gnaw away at me and I slowly cough up my own blood until one day I will have coughed up all of it and I will merely die. I am their cheese. But there is no steel spring attached to me, no loaded mechanism to snap the rat's neck when the cheese is pushed or pulled too hard. I am no rat-trap. I am an impotent, defenseless piece of flat, thin plywood, a serving tray for the rats, a serving tray for the cheese.

I am at a funeral I once went to. At my age I have gone to so many. I don't remember if it is my uncle or if it is his wife. But someone I know is dead. All of us stand around and talk while a few feet away a dead body lies in a copper box. There is no smile on the face. The eyes are closed. There is no blood in the face. And I know, I know, that everyone is thinking what I am thinking. Thank God it's not me that's lying in the copper box. I get sick at this funeral. I excuse myself to the bathroom, and I throw up. On my knees, I vomit into the toilet.

Maybe that's why I'm here. Maybe I won't let them look at me in a copper box. Maybe I won't let them talk about

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me while I am nothing other than simply dead. Maybe I won't let them thank God it's not them that's where I am. Maybe I will cheat them out of their ritual. Or maybe I am just scared. Maybe I felt death in that house. Maybe not. I begin to cough again.

"What do you mean, you didn't know she would take it that way?" she demands of me.

"I had no idea she would take it that way."

"You had no idea? How else would she have taken it?"

Look I said I was sorry. There's nothing more to talk about, and that means I'm not going to talk about it. Isn't it nice how that works out?" I drink the last of the coffee. I leave the cup on the table. I walk out the door, already sorry for what I did.

2

I wake up in the same room in which I fell asleep. Street lights shine in from the window without any curtains. The bed is neither comfortable nor uncomfortable. It serves its function, that is all. In the darkness that is lessened by the city's lamps, the room looks grey. I wonder if they are thinking about me. I left a note for the woman I am married to. It said I was going away for a while. It said I love you. She deserves more than this, but she will understand. She knows that I am dying. She knows what I know. She kept me from laughing too hard at myself. She kept me from scolding our children perhaps a little too hard. She asked me to dance with her at the weddings that came up every so often when someone we knew, or someone to whom we were related, was married. I didn't want to, but I did it for her. We danced together the way we had danced together for forty years. She had been a nice girl and was still in many ways that girl, but different. She knew that to those that knew me I was not dying, I was already dead. I was dead as soon as they heard I was ill. She also knew this. I was no longer to be asked to

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play cards, no longer to be invited on fishing trips, no longer to be spoken to for an extended period. If you breathe too deeply, or if someone sneezes, you might catch stomach cancer. It's just sympathy someone said, but it isn't sympathy. Sympathy is what they feel for my wife, for my children. I'm sorry your husband is dying. I'm sorry your father is dying. He was a good man they would say. No. This is not what they feel for me. Sympathy is for those who survive. All they feel for me is pity. And pity is not the same. Maybe Jesus takes pity on the lepers. Maybe he takes pity on the thieves who are crucified beside him. But I am neither a leper nor a thief and I don't want anyone's pity, not even his. I want to die with dignity. I want to hold onto that dignity even while the rats eat me away. That's why I'm here.

3

Today my stomach hurts. It hurts every day, but today it hurts more. It's like I've been kicked in the stomach very hard. I don't want to move, so I take some of the pills they have given me, and I lie there, waiting for them to save me, waiting for them to take the pain away from me. I lie there and I cough. I have not been so reflective during my life. Perhaps it is only when a man approaches death that he becomes reflective, that he begins to think. I don't want to die without thinking. I don't know about what. But I want to have thought. This seems important. Perhaps thought will take the place of this uneasiness. Perhaps it will replace it with something reassuring. Perhaps it will keep me from slipping quietly away. Perhaps the thought will justify the pain. And the pain. Now I think about this room. How very much like a tomb it is. Small. Square. Cold. Bare. Many parts of it have human names. The head and foot of the bed. The back and arm and leg of the chair. One would almost think that the room had a certain life to it. But it does not. There are only dead things here. Dead things, and things soon to be dead. The bed in which I lie is covered in white cotton shrouds, and

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a thin layer of woolen earth. They need only for me to die. I lie on my back and stare out the window that lies just beyond my feet. I stare at the telephone wires, at the grey sky. I stare at nothing.

I am sitting on the stoop of the front porch in my shirt sleeves. The night air is warm and thick and foreign, and I am smoking. I can hear the buzz of the street lights and the crickets and the cicadas in the trees. They echo in the abandon of the dark. They echo for me, and I blow a cloud of smoke. Inside my family is asleep, but I cannot sleep. So I am awake, and I am sitting on the porch, and I am smoking.

4

I have become hungry. This must be a good sign certainly, since I don't remember having eaten for several days. I get out of bed, and put on clothes. At my age, my clothes are mostly the same. There are simply new ones and old ones. These are old ones, but they are more comfortable than new ones. Today I go outside because I am hungry. There is no food to be had at City Hotel. It's not that kind of hotel. That is what the sign says. It does not say that there is no food there, but it is understood. So much is understood. One understands the sign. Often I don't understand, but then when someone takes the time to explain the question to me, the answer is always the same: it's simply understood. I wish to know sometimes how this man or that man knows that it is understood, but that is a question that cannot be asked. I'm certain that the answer to that one is also that it is understood. I step out of the door and walk down the sidewalk. Cars pass in the street. People pass on the sidewalk, but they have nothing to do with me. I have no reason to be concerned about them, and I am alone for the first time in my life. But I am not lonely. I have had enough of concern. I want to be unconcerned. To be distanced enough to do what I may or may not do. Perhaps when a man dies he should be alone. But perhaps this is also not true.

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I walk into a soup kitchen. My old clothes probably allow me to do this without raising questions, questions whose answers are probably not understood. In my previous life, I had given money, some of the money I made at the job at which I was employed five of the seven days of each week, to this soup kitchen. I felt good about giving the money to them. I think that it was probably prideful. I don't care if it was prideful. I am here to eat now. I have money. I took money with me when I left my home. But I don't want to use it. I want to eat here. I want to eat with these people who look as if they are dying too. Maybe I am just flattering myself. Maybe I think I am slumming. Maybe I want to feel sorry for myself. Maybe I just want to eat with other people, people who won't recognize me. But maybe none of these reasons are correct. That, too, is possible.

I eat hot soup from a styrofoam bowl, and bread that is fresh but cold. The food fills my stomach immediately, but has little of what in a different life I might have called flavor. It makes me feel almost satisfied. I drink three cups of coffee, and then I leave. I pass the other people, flattering myself, slumming, feeling sorry for myself, unrecognized, all of these things.

5

On my way back to City Hotel, I pass the junior college. I came here after I finished my secondary education. I studied business because it was what all the young men studied. After a number of years, I no longer remember how many, they granted me a degree in something I can no longer recall. I took this degree to the office building next door to the junior college, and they granted me a job. For forty years I wrote things down and stapled them, paper-clipped them, and put them into folders with things written on them which were difficult to understand. I wore a shirt to work each day, each day a tie was tied to that shirt. I had a certain number of ties, and every so often, they would repeat. I went to

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meetings with other men, sat in other men's offices, was called in, was asked to take a seat. One day, maybe twenty years ago, perhaps longer, I was given an office for myself. Then I called younger men into my office. I asked them to sit. I asked them questions about this and that. And I received answers that were difficult to understand. One day the man whose office was bigger than all of the other men's offices asked me if I would like to stop working there at the office building next to the junior college. Because I was ill, he said. Because it was my prerogative, he said. Don't you see I had to go? The way they looked at me. The way their whispers reached me even when they struggled not to be heard. The distance between us was never so great that I couldn't hear them. Their politeness. Holding doors open for me, as though the rats were in my arms! I could remain there no more than I could remain in the house that that employment five of the seven days of each week had paid for. So I left.

When I had put all of my things into three cardboard boxes, the man gave me a gold watch. It was expensive. Even I could see that. I had bought watches for the man before, watches for men who were sixty-five years old. They had not been as expensive as this. To be given an expensive watch, you had to be sick. You had to be dying. You had to be the object of pity. I put it in my pocket like the change left from buying a cup of coffee. I shook his hand and I picked up my cardboard boxes and left, my arms strong enough to carry all of it, and even open the doors.

6

Hate is a low form of emotion, I think. But I am in hate as once when I was young I had been in love. I don't think hate is stronger, but it is clearer. Is this where I have come? To hate? Perhaps yes. I walk into the pawn shop that is two blocks past the office building next to the junior college. I give him the watch. I give it to him as though it were a bad luck charm, a broken mirror. He knows it is a valuable watch.

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He must also know that I am ill. He must read it in my emaciated face, in my clothes that I can no longer even pretend fit me. The rats have eaten away too much of me. He gives me money for it. I give some of the money back in exchange for the metal revolver that lies under the glass. He hands it to me backwards. I suppose this is the way one hands over a revolver.

"Have you got any bullets?" I ask him.

"They're already in there," he replies.

"Six?"

"That's how many."

"Thank you."

He does not respond. I place the revolver into the pocket of my coat. It is a big coat, and so the revolver does not stick out. On the way back to City Hotel, I stop at the grocery store. The revolver is heavy in the pocket, and pulls the coat down. With the money that is left over from my purchase of the revolver, I buy some food for myself. I buy bread. Some fruits, a vegetable. I also buy a notebook, the kind I used to buy for my son and daughter when they used to attend school. This time I buy it for myself. There is only me now. I buy it because I want to write some of this down. Maybe I will write another note to the woman I am married to. Maybe this time I will do more than apologize and say I love you. When I take these things up to the register to pay for them, the revolver knocks against the counter inside my coat. I pretend that I don't hear it. The boy who rings up the purchases probably didn't hear it either. But maybe I am being too hard on him. Maybe he is bright and observant. Maybe he did hear it. Maybe I am just an old man who is angry.

We were driving home from Thanksgiving at her parents' home. It was late, and the headlamps of the car cut bright arcs into the black road and the yellow lines zipped in, through, and out of the glowing hemispheres. Next to me in the passenger seat she slept, her head lying gently on the seat. In the back seat, they both slept. Quiet, innocent,

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curled up like animals. Only I was awake, and I felt like I was protecting them.

7

I walk back into the lobby of city Hotel with a grocery bag in my hands and a revolver in my pocket. I walk up the stairs to the third floor. I walk down the hall to room C. On my way, I pass a man in the hall who smells strongly of gin. He is asleep on the floor. He is drooling into a small puddle on the stained and dirty carpet. He also smells of urine, urine and gin. I open the door with the dirty key and I begin to cough again. I place the food in the bottom drawer of the bureau. I remove my coat and I sit down at the table by the window with the revolver in my hand. I look at the framed picture that sits on the table. It was taken ten, perhaps twelve, perhaps fifteen years ago. My boy was fifteen or so. His sister must then have been seventeen. She looks like me. He does not. He looks like his mother. Is that the way it goes? The first-born looks like the father? I could swear it was the other way. But what's the use of that now? If she's lucky, the similarity between us will end there. Here I am in city Hotel. I was born almost two miles from here, in a house on what was once State Route 4. I grew up in that house two miles away. I went to the junior college that was a mile and a half from that house. I bought a house of my own a half a mile away from the junior college and the office building adjacent to it. And now I am here, two miles away from what was once State Route 4. In sixty years I have moved a total of two miles. Two miles, two children, a wife, two houses, a degree in something I no longer recall, a stomach full of rats, and a loaded revolver. Maybe she will move farther than two miles. She already has. He has too. The other woman hasn't. She is waiting for me on Amherst Road, where the second of the two houses I have lived in stands. I'm certain she is worried. I'm certain she is crying. But then perhaps she is not crying. Perhaps she is glad I'm gone. Perhaps, like me, she is happy

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to be alone for the first time in her life. But how do I know that she hasn't been alone before? All of these years I have been with her, perhaps she has been alone. Perhaps she has led a life completely away from, completely outside of me. Perhaps I don't even know her. I will stop the questions now before I am forced to answer questions that I don't want to ask. But why should I stop here? Is this a time for me to stop? Is this a time to go only halfway? Do I know who this is? This man with the revolver? I can't remember any of it. I remember some of the bigger events. When I married the woman on Amherst Road. When my son got married. When his sister got married. When they were born. When. . . What else was there? There must have been something else! What else was there?! Will I recall none of it? Did I leave no record? If not, did it ever happen? Will no one ever know that I was there? No one, for that matter, never even need know I am here. The woman who smells for alcohol does not know my name. I am merely some dirty, thin old man. I am empty now. My whole body, from my head, to my stomach, to my feet is empty. It is beyond pain, beyond remorse or despair. It is merely empty. Merely. That is the word. I will not die. I am merely here, and soon I will merely die.

I look again at the picture. I could almost look happy. Couldn't I? So does the woman whose hand I am holding. Who were we for forty years of our lives? Whose lives? Was this life mine? Or did I take it from someone I will never know, someone who would have done something more than merely this or merely that, someone who at the moment of his death would know what to do? It was an accident. I couldn't have realized it. Sixty years of an accident have left me a trembling ruin. I turn the picture from me. Now you must take them away from me. Now I must take myself away from them.

I put the end of the revolver into my mouth. It feels very cold on my tongue. It tastes dirty, oily, like a plumber's wrench. I feel my finger on the trigger. I feel it quiver. I feel it rest on this piece of steel. I feel it almost move. I squeeze my eyes shut tightly. I bite down on the dirty barrel of the re-

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volver. I stick the tip of my tongue into the hole at the end of the barrel. I almost move. I almost move. My hand shakes almost enough to. . . But nothing happens. My hand is as impotent as the rest of me. If it has come to this, then it is only possible that I could have done nothing. For so long I have done nothing. Why would it be possible now? Would to have done it given me my dignity? Did not doing it preserve my dignity? I cannot answer these questions because I don't know how to answer them. I have never known how to answer them, because I have never known what dignity is. I have never had to ask what dignity is because I have never been dying. But now I need to know. I drop the revolver onto the table and dig the heels of my hands into my eyes. I begin to cry. Perhaps later I will tell someone that it is because I wouldn't give in, give in to the rats, but this may not be the truth. It may be part of the truth, but it is certainly not all of the truth. If I knew the truth I could tell them. I would tell them. Or perhaps the truth is something I would keep to myself.

8

I put the pistol into the bottom drawer of the bureau. And again I sleep. When I wake I feel different. My stomach hurts, and I take some of the pills. There are not many pills left. What will I do when they run out? But I feel different. If I stop and try very hard, I can still taste the pistol in my mouth. Something has changed. Whether or not it gave me dignity or took it from me, I am no longer the same. There is nothing in this room but scarred furniture, a little food, a notebook, and a revolver, and so there is nothing left for me here. I put on warm clothing, eat a piece of the bread, and walk out of City Hotel with the notebook in my hand. From the lobby, I take a short, dull pencil, and put this carefully into my coat pocket.

I will go somewhere. Which place is probably not important. I want to go somewhere. It sounds like a

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children's book. Today I went somewhere. Here is what I did. But maybe I am a child. Maybe it is time for me to grow up. But grow into what? I already cannot walk very fast. I must already take stairs slowly. I must hold onto the rails.

I walk down Front Street slowly and deliberately. I take my time to look around me, to see the things that are printed in the storefront windows, to examine the faces that pass. Tools are sold here. There, clothing. This one is taller, or shorter; this one is younger, or older. I take my time to notice my step, and to notice the cracks and imperfections in the sidewalk. These are things I have never seen before. They have been here I'm certain, just as I am certain that I lived some sort of life before this moment, this day. But I noticed it as little as I noticed the cracks in the sidewalk, and I really don't remember. But now I want to notice. I want to remember. I want to imprint something on my brain here. I want something to affect me, to make an impression. This, I think, will make things different.

When I didn't notice the new dress she had bought she became very angry with me. She had spent so much. It was my favorite color. She pretended to cry, I think. I tried to make an excuse, but the more I said, the worse I made it all. Could I have seen? Yes, certainly I could have. She noticed things like that. Why couldn't I? I tried to make it up to her. I bought her flowers. The same color as the dress. She liked them. She put them in water.

9

Four blocks down Front Street I pass the public library. I seem to remember driving my children here on more than just one occasion. Their schools wanted them to know certain things that were here, that were kept here. In my entire life, my life since I left the junior college, I have never read a book. I read all the poems that my daughter wrote, and showed to me proudly. I pretended to understand the emotions she talked about even when I did not. I read all

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of the newspaper articles that my son wrote, and I cut them out and put them on the door of the refrigerator for a while, and then put them carefully into a scrapbook. I must have read thousands of newspapers. One for each day. Thousands of Christmas cards, birthday cards, thousands of reports at the office building. Thousands of analyses on subjects which were difficult to understand. But never a book. The children sometimes asked for them for Christmas, and the man at the bookshop always found them for me from the shelves. I paid for them and left. I wrapped them and put them under the tree. But I never read them, not one. But it's probably too late for that now. I have little time left, a few more coughs perhaps.

I said thank you to my father as he lay dying in his bed of something I am no longer certain of. I am certain he coughed up no blood. He died a clean death. One with no mess. With a sense of closure. A death I may never know.

I do not know where to begin. All beginnings are difficult. We fumble to manipulate something that is foreign, something that does not fit our hand, something we have not seen before, something that is not understood. We try to use it in the ways in which we have used other things, but that does not work. A new beginning requires new methods, new understandings. Someone has to do it for us at first, to hold our hand, and guide it, then perhaps we can learn by imitation, by copying one for whom it is understood. This is how I showed my son to throw a baseball, the way I showed my daughter to cast a fishing line.

I was sitting alone in a restaurant for lunch. The day before had been our anniversary. I had given her a bracelet. She had given me a clock for my office. I had watched the clock. 10 had followed 9 and 11 had followed 10, and then a beautiful woman had walked by my table. She was young and smelled like romance. She was the kind of woman someone ought to be dancing with. i might dance with her. No, no that is not appropriate. I mustn't think of that. I will think of something else. I tried to think of some-

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thing else.

10

I think I know now where I must go. Two blocks past the library, I turn left off Front street, and walk down Second. I think now that I have never walked down Second Street. Maybe once when I was too young to remember it, and by this I mean probably only a few years ago. One simply got into one's car and drove down second street on one's way somewhere else. I have only ever gone down second Street to get to someplace else. But now is a time of firsts, a time of beginnings.

Her house, I know, is only one block from Front. It is a brick house. The shutters that flank the windows are red, and lovely purple flowers sit in planters on the front porch. I drove by this house once a few years ago, after I learned the address. The woman I am married to plants flowers, too. She puts them in front of the house and in back of the house. They look nice, but to be honest, I have never been much moved by flowers. They always seemed alot to care for. But then I'm not sure if that's really why. I don't know if I can do this, but I also don't know if I can stop myself.

I knock on the door instead of ringing the bell. I know that this is where she lives because of the article that appeared in the newspaper when the man she was married to died. He was as old as I am now, and I know somehow that I will someday be the subject of a newspaper article, the first that will ever be about me.

It takes her some time to reach the front door, but she opens it quickly. She looks at me, old and thin, and bitter, although perhaps this last she does not see. Perhaps only I see this. I say nothing, and she looks puzzled. She looks at me again. Still I say nothing. She looks as if she will slam the door, but then she sees something in my face. Sees something she recognizes from many years earlier.

"Is it you?" she asks.

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"Yes."

"What do you want?"

"I wanted to see you. To talk to you again. It's been so long. I'm sick you see."

"Is it contagious? I just got over the flu. I don't want another bug going around this house."

"Don't worry. I'm not contagious."

"Tell me one more time what you want."

"Just to talk. Just to talk to you one more time."

"All right. Come in then. Do you want some tea? I just took the kettle off."

"Yes, yes that would be fine." Fine, not nice, not splendid. Fine. Why fine? Why didn't I use the word splendid? I have never used the word splendid. Ever. I sit in the parlor, and in a moment she comes in with two cups of hot tea. She hands one to me and sits with the other one in a chair facing me. There is a coffee table between us, and I somehow think that this is a good thing. I don't want her to feel too uncomfortable. But how else could she feel?

"How have you been?" I ask her.

"You waited forty years to ask me how I've been?"

"I'm sorry for that. For all of that."

"It's not important anymore. I don't really remember what we were, to each other that is." Were we in love? We might have been. She is the woman I thought first of marrying. We were together while I attended the junior college. We went to movies together.

Sometimes in the winter we went ice skating. I remember picking her up at her parents' house. I remember kissing her just out of reach of the street lamp. I also remember something about thinking of asking her to marry me. But I did not. The moment for that came and passed, and she knew that it had. She knew, I think, in the way that women, some women, know when moments have passed, that that question would never come. That it would not come from me. It did come from the other man, the man who was now dead. I don't know why he asked that question when I could

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not. I don't know why I could not marry her and why he could. If I knew once then I no longer recall.

Soon after I did not marry her, I met the woman I did marry. When that moment came, I asked her that question, and she said yes, just as this woman might have said yes. Why could I ask the second, but not the first? Why, indeed. Why? I am hit by this question. Over and over it is bashed over my head. But the beating doesn't force out an answer. It only makes me more and more sick.

"I did love you once," I say to her.

"You certainly had a strange way of showing things."

"I know. I'm afraid it was all a mistake."

"Why do you say that? We had a lot of fun together didn't we?"

"I . . . I have cancer you see."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I really am very sorry. Is it quite serious?"

"Yes probably. They say it's in my stomach. So I'm dying you see, and I . . . I wanted to see you, and. . ." I stop here. What might I tell her? That my life has been an accident perhaps? That perhaps it has all been a mistake? That I don't remember any of it, and that it will soon be over, and I will have nothing to show? Should I tell her that I came to see her because I wanted to see what my life might have been like if I hadn't let that moment come and go, if I had been the one to marry her instead of the man who was now dead? What would she say to this? Would she say get out? She would be right in doing so. This is perversion isn't it? Trying to see into a future that never existed because of a past I did not choose. She has no responsibility for my regret. Maybe she lived a wonderful life after that moment had come and gone. Maybe she and the man were happy together. Maybe she remembers all of it, every minute. Maybe she never would have been happy if I had married her. Maybe I am just trespassing with my remorse on her rug, in her home, drinking her tea, saying things, but not the things I want to say.

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"It's all right," she says. "You don't have to explain. When my husband was dying, he wanted so desperately to go back and change things that hadn't gone right with the past. Apologize for things, make things up."

"Were you happy? Here? With him?"

"I was very happy. He was a wonderful man. Just as you are a wonderful man." She says this, perhaps, to make me feel better. I hope it would not be presumptuous of me to think that my rejection hurt her. I am glad she was happy. It makes me feel better, about something at least.

"Were, I mean, are you happy? With your wife I mean?"

"Oh yes very happy. It's all just come to such a queer end, that's all." In some ways she is like the woman I am married to. They look somewhat alike now at this age, although if I think hard I believe that they probably also looked somewhat alike many years ago. They are both kind and gentle women. Both sets of arms held me. Why did I choose to live my life with the other arms? They are not the same I think. This one smiles a little differently. That one walks a tad slower or faster, with more grace, or with less deliberateness. The tone of this one's voice is not the same. It is higher, or perhaps lower. Can I see myself in this chair for forty years, drinking tea with this woman, kissing her hello, kissing her goodbye? Can I see her face in the picture that sits on the table by the window in room C? I cannot, I think. I am in this chair for the first time, and the longer I sit in it, I think that I feel that this was meant to be the first time that I would sit in it. This chair belongs to a future, a present, I did not choose.

This woman and I talk for almost an hour. She tells me of her children. I tell her of my boy and girl. She asks me what I have done with my life. This question makes me immediately shudder, but I don't let her see this. But maybe she does anyway. I tell her about my employment at the office building. I go over the larger events of my life. I tell her about the woman, but only carefully, choosing the most

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impersonal things to tell her. I don't want to speak about her to this woman. That seems very unfair. I talk mostly about my children, however. Their lives seem much more important to me now than my own does. Maybe this is because I cannot bear to tell this woman the truth about my own life. But maybe I am being too suspicious of myself. Maybe they are what I have done with my life. At least I can look at them and say, "This is what I have done. I have helped to make this." I taught them both how to ride a bicycle when they were old enough. I taught them how to play ball. I helped them with the things their schoolteachers gave them to do at home. I drove them to libraries, to soccer games. I punished them when they did things that their mother and I would not allow in our home. I taught them to say prayers to a God I have never known. My little girl has a girl of her own now. She, perhaps, is now thinking what I am thinking, or maybe she will not think this until she is dying.

I put the tea cup down on the coffee table and slowly stand up.

"I really must go now. I have some things I must do." She does not want me to go it seems, but all things are forgiven a man who is dying. The benefit of the doubt now permanently rests with me.

"Thank you for coming," she says, as though it were her idea for me to trespass this late into her life. "It was good to see you again after so long." I think she really does mean this. I don't know if she does, but I would like to think that she means it, and so I will.

"Thank you for allowing me to come."

I shake her hand as I stand under the doorframe. Her hand is warm. She smiles into my face. She kisses me on the cheek. I turn and walk down the steps, down the path, and out onto the sidewalk, leaving her again, for what must certainly be the last time. As I walk down the street, none of it looks familiar. I could have lived in that house with her, but I did not. I am glad that I did not. She is warm and kind. But she was not for me. She was for the other man. He was for

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her. I know now that I love the woman I am married to. I love her as much as it is possible for me to love her. I hope that is enough, for it is all that I have.

11

I have now returned to Front Street, and I continue to walk in the direction I had been going before. I walk for a number of blocks. I do not count them because I am not tired, and I have nowhere to be. Perhaps this is me slipping quietly away. I am still carrying the notebook with me, but it is neither heavy nor burdensome. Perhaps this is because nothing has been written in it. Maybe if there were words in it, it would be difficult to carry. Maybe the weight of those words would tire me. As things are, I am travelling light. I have no words with me. I have only the thoughts that flash on the television screen of my mind, rapidly changing channels. It seems I have been stuck on the same channel for a long time. Now that I know there are other channels, it is difficult to stay on one for long. Death has, in a sense, freed me from a great deal. The idea of death has freed me from the death that was my life. But how can I call it a death, when there were so many lives in it? But it was a death somehow. It was the death of forgetting a self I was too young to know. But that has come.

He says he is sorry. That doesn't excuse it. He took the gun from out of the closet while his mother and I were away. He shot a hole in the floor. I don't care about that. A rug can cover the hole. But he could have shot his sister. He could have shot himself. He is sent to his room to be punished. His mother is crying at the kitchen table. I take the gun out of the closet, and I throw it away.

12

I am standing now in front of a church. The sign on the grass says that it is a Catholic church. It says something

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about services and Sunday school, but I don't read it carefully. I am thinking about something else. I know I am not a Catholic. My father took us, myself, my mother, my sister, my brother, to the church whose sign on the grass said something else, and included information about services and Sunday school. I didn't know what that something else meant. Still now I do not. Certainly the God is not different. But maybe he is. That is a mistake I am willing to make.

It is quiet inside, and it is half dark. There are about twenty wooden pews on either side of the church, and a clean, quiet aisle cuts them neatly in two. At the front of the church are an assortment of candles, a few statues, and other church-type arrangements. This is not so different than the church which she and I brought our children to. I sit in one of the pews. I am the only one in the church. Maybe this is a good time to pray. I have always had a difficult time praying to someone who is my God. Whatever one says seems shallow, seems incomplete, seems unjustified. I find that it is best to simply make a few general thanks and then excuse oneself. This is what I do now. For the woman, for my boy and for my girl, for her little girl, for. . .for my life? Can I thank him for this? Would I be betraying myself? No, I will thank him anyway, whether or not I really mean it. This is also a mistake I am willing to make.

Now that I am done thanking God, I do not know what to do. I have come all this way, and I don't know what to do now. I am lost inside this church.

But perhaps I am not lost. This is where I have come, and I do not believe that it is entirely by accident, although I do not know what the complement of that would be. I look down at the notebook that sits silently by me in the pew. I pick it up and open it. Just as I had imagined, its pages are blank. They contain no words. They are empty pages with nothing to give me except everything. They can give me themselves. They can give me myself. I take the short, dull pencil out of my coat pocket. Beginnings are difficult. I fumble to manipulate this thing that is foreign, that does not fit my hand, that I

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have not seen before, that I do not understand. I could try to use it in the way in which I have used other things, but that will not work. I need to be shown, but only I am here to show myself. Only I can be here to make this beginning. I take the pencil in my old and wrinkled hand, my hand that is shaking with the weight of my whole life, my hand that had caressed her beautiful face, my hand that has wiped away her tears, their tears, my own tears, my hand that has shaken another man's hand, my hand that held a revolver in my mouth, my hand that threw that revolver away, my hand that held the hand of a dying father, my hand that has held the hand of a child.

With this hand I write,
This is what happened

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